

March 19, 2003

Public Notice for 401 Certification
Russian River Summer Crossings
Sonoma County

On November 4, 2002 the Regional Water Quality Control Board (Regional Water Board) received an application from Ms. Alynn Woodruff, on behalf of the Sonoma County Department of Public Transportation and Public Works (County), requesting approval for disturbances to waters of the state and other water quality impacts associated with the development of the proposed project.

The lower Russian River summer crossings are located at Odd Fellows Road at Korbel, Summer Crossing Road at Guerneville Park, and Vacation Beach Avenue at Vacation Beach. The upper summer crossing is at Washington School Road at Asti. In the past the lower crossings have been in place from mid-May until mid-October of each year, and the Asti crossing has been in place from mid-May until mid-November. Historically, each crossing has had a similar design. A portion of the stream channel is constructed with either removable steel deck panels on concrete piers, or a permanent bridge structure, while the majority of the crossing is built from compacted local fill material (mostly dirt with some river gravel). The purpose of the summer crossings is to provide relief from the traffic congestion associated with summer tourism, and to provide emergency services with better access and faster response times to areas on either side of the river.

The construction of the summer crossings, as they have been built in the past, results in significant impacts to water quality in the form of large sediment discharges into the river. In the past, when dirt and gravel fill was used, a large sediment load would be pushed into the channel. The Russian River is listed as impaired for sediment, and provides habitat for three listed salmonids. Therefore, the County has applied for Water Quality Certification, and has proposed changes to the way in which the crossings are constructed.

For the lower crossings, as proposed, the steel deck panels will be used as they have been in the past, but the base of each crossing will be built of clean river-run gravel instead of local dirt. Heavy equipment will slowly push the gravel into the water until the gravel base extends across the river. The base will be built to a height of at least two feet above the water level at the time of construction. The rest of the crossing will be constructed of the stockpiled dirt and gravel material that has been used in the past.

As proposed, the lower crossings will be removed by gradually skimming the dirt layer off of the gravel and pushing it up the dry bank into the stockpile area (which is outside the ordinary high water area). The gravel that is above the water will also be skimmed off, as much as feasible, while the rest of the gravel will be left in the water. When winter flows increase, the gravel in the channel will be distributed along the river bottom. Conditions in the permit are expected to specify the minimum size for the gravel material discharged into the River. This size criteria

will help ensure that the discharge will not impact beneficial uses. Additional permit conditions will require that the fine sediment used for the road base be removed at the end of the season and that protective measures be installed to protect against its discharge during roadway use. To prevent further sedimentation of the river due to erosion, erosion and sediment control measures will be implemented along the bank where heavy equipment has been operated.

As proposed, the Asti crossing will be built similarly to the way it has been done in the past. Unlike the lower crossings, the river in the area of the Asti crossing includes many gravel bars. Therefore rather than importing gravel for the base, heavy equipment will skim local gravel bars for building material. Conditions will require that this material is clean of fine sediment and meets the size criteria for discharge into the River. Due to the way the river meanders in this area, there are several options for constructing the crossing. If the river is flowing in the Eastern portion of the channel, a gravel roadway will be built from the West side of the river until it meets up with the 60 foot long, two-span temporary bridge. If the river is flowing in the Western portion of the channel, a 100 foot Bailey bridge is used to span the active channel, and the gravel crossing is built from the Eastern bank. It is also possible that both of these methods will need to be employed.

The construction schedule proposed for the crossings has also changed. Placement of gravel within the flowing channel of the Russian River will not occur before June 15, and removal will occur no later than October 15. However, in the case of Asti the removal date is proposed for November 1 in order to accommodate the needs of the California Department of Forestry to have better access during fire season. The dates have been changed from their historic times in order to minimize impacts to listed salmonids.

The project as described in this public notice may change as a result of the review process. Consulting agencies for this project include the California Department of Fish and Game, the United States Army Corps of Engineers, and the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration Fisheries Service (formerly National Marine Fisheries Service).

At this time the Regional Water Quality Control Board is in the process of reviewing the proposed project regarding the issuance of the 401 Certification Permit. In addition, the Regional Water Quality Control Board will consider all comments received during a 21-day comment period that begins on the first date of issuance of this letter. If you have any questions or comments, please contact staff member Lauren Hocker by email at hockl@rb1.swrcb.ca.gov, or send comments to Regional Water Quality Control Board, 5550 Skylane Boulevard, Suite A, Santa Rosa, CA 95403.